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ABSTRACT

This report presents the findings of a non-returner survey, which was developed to elicit information from students who enrolled at Nevada's Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC) as first-time college students but did not return the following semester. The intent of this research was to determine what type of students do not persist, what factors have an influence on student persistence, and what TMCC can do to increase student persistence. The first-time college student cohort from fall 1997 was comprised of 1692 students, 917 of whom did not return for the spring 1998 semester, producing a 54% attrition rate. Only 2% of the 87 respondents stated that coursework was too difficult, while less than 3% expressed that the number of course requirements were a major problem. Sixty-eight percent was satisfied with the quality of instruction and their overall experience at TMCC (71%). Common reasons cited for not returning were the completion of desired coursework (31%), financial difficulties (20%), and work schedule conflicts (8%). Sixty-nine percent of the respondents worked 20 hours or more while they were attending TMCC. Eighteen percent cited "transfer to a four-year school" as their educational goal, while 20% wanted a degree from TMCC. Forty-seven percent felt that they had obtained their educational goal. (JA)

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ED 443 471

NON-RETURNER SURVEY

TRUCKEE MEADOWS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

FALL 1998

D. Kedzier

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Introduction

In the Summer of 1998, an effort was undertaken to track students who enrolled at TMCC as first-time college students, but did not return the following semester. A non-returner survey was developed to elicit information from these students. The intent of this research was three fold: 1) gain insight into what type of students do not persist, 2), determine what factors (i.e. financial, college services) have an influence on student persistence, and 3) determine what TMCC can do to increase student persistence.

Methodology

Population: The target population in this study was all first-time college students who entered in Fall 1997 and did not return for the Spring semester of 1998. The first-time college student cohort from Fall 1997 was comprised of 1692 students, 917 who did not returned for the Spring 1998 semester, producing a 54% attrition rate. From the 917 non-returning students, 883 students were mailed surveys (34 of the addresses were either indistinguishable or residing in a foreign country). Response rates were low, with only 87 students returning useable surveys (10% response rate).

Instrumentation & Procedure: The survey was designed as a single-page flyer that could be folded in reverse for return mailing. The population was offered a five-dollar coupon at Raley's Supermarket for the return of the survey and given an open-ended return date.

Data Analysis: Due to the low response rate, statistically significant results were difficult, if not impossible to produce. In this case, a survey sample size with an acceptable confidence level (95%) and margin of error (± 4) would require approximately 300 useable responses, or a response rate of 34%. While statistical significance was not achieved, the campus can still utilize the descriptive information produced by this study to gain insight into student persistence.

Results

There were a variety of reasons why new students in the Fall of 1997 did not return in Spring 1998. In general, the survey results indicated that reasons for not returning were more likely associated with individual problems than discontent with TMCC programs and services. Only 2% of the respondents stated that coursework was too difficult, while less than 3% expressed that the number of course requirements were a major problem. An overwhelming majority (68%) was satisfied with the quality of instruction and their overall experience at

TMCC (71%). Common reasons cited for not returning were: the completion of desired coursework, financial difficulties, and time management issues.

Completion of desired coursework was the most common reason for not returning: 31% stated this as their reason for not returning. In addition, 47% felt that they had achieved their educational goals. Even though these outlooks on attainment did not differ among age groups, the educational goals held by students significantly differed by age. In general, students under 25 years of age were more likely to focus on degree programs or transfer credits, while non-traditional students (25 years and older) had a tendency to pursue job skills and advancement or personal enrichment.

Financial aspects also put pressures on the non-returning students. Approximately 20% of the respondents stated that financial difficulties actually hindered them from continuing their studies. Furthermore, 60% felt that the cost of college was a problem, while 43% stated that financial problems were obstacles. These financial problems seemed to be harder on the younger students. There were approximately twice as many students under 25 years of age that expressed frustration with the cost of college and general financial problems.

Non-returning students were also likely to hold jobs while attending college. Close to 70% of the respondents worked 20 hours or more per week. However, only 8%

cited work schedule conflicts as a primary reason for their discontinuance. Time management, balancing work and study, and stress were common problems among the non-returning students. Not surprisingly, those who worked more than 20 hours per week were more likely to strongly express these aspects.

Highlights:

- 70% of the respondents were enrolled in 5 or fewer credits while attending TMCC.
- 67% attended the majority of their classes at the Dandini campus, while 22% attended at the Old Town Mall.
- 69% of the respondents worked 20 hours or more while they were attending TMCC.
- 44% of the respondents were 20 years of age or less.
- 29% of the respondents had at least one dependent child.
- Roughly 3 out of every 10 respondents came to TMCC in order to upgrade their job skills.
- 18% of the population cited "transfer to a four-year school" as their educational goal, while 20% stated that they were interested in seeking a degree from TMCC.
- 47% of respondents felt that they had obtained their educational goal.
- An overwhelming majority of respondents were satisfied with their overall experiences (71%), classroom facilities (70%), registration process (69%),

instruction quality (67%), faculty helpfulness (63%), and variety of courses offered (53%).

- Typical reasons cited for not returning: completed desired coursework (31%), financial difficulties (20%), and work schedule conflicts (8%).
- Finding transportation to TMCC was not cited as a major problem for students.
- The top five major problems students faced while attending: cost (26%), balancing class and work (20%), financial problems (17%), time management (14%), stress (10%) and family problems (10%).